

Heritage Citation



Baby Clinic (former)

Key details

Also known as	State Government Medical Office
Addresses	At 51 Herschel Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Clinic
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Georgian Revival
Lot plan	L4_B361
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — June 2006

Construction

Roof: Terracotta tile;
Walls: Face brick

Criterion for listing

(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (H) Historical association

This two-storey brick building was constructed in 1934 for use as a baby clinic. It was built on the site of an earlier clinic that had been established in the 1920s. Infant mortality had been a serious cause for concern in Brisbane since the 1800s. It was not until the late 1910s however that the Queensland Government established dedicated welfare clinics to help combat this growing problem by providing advice and welfare to mothers and their babies.. In its first year after opening, almost 13000 women and children attended this clinic, with attendance peaking at almost 20000 in 1970.

History

In the post World War One period, national alarm about the declining birth rate that had been identified from the turn of the century was exacerbated in Queensland by the military vulnerability of the State. The northern and western regions had sparse populations and there was a genuine fear of invasion from Australia's northern Asian neighbours, as well as from Germany and the Netherlands, both of which had imperialist ambitions in the Pacific. A healthy, steadily increasing population was believed to be essential to the continued existence of the State and nation.

The Infant Welfare Movement, which aimed to improve conditions for infants and advise mothers about 'correct' child-rearing practices, operated in Australia from 1903. In Queensland, the Lady Chelmsford Milk Institute provided cheap, sterilised milk for young Brisbane children from 1908, complementing the work of Alfred Jefferis Turner, the first resident medical officer of the Hospital for Sick Children. Following the election of a reformist Labor Government in Queensland in 1915, infant welfare, like other forms of social welfare, was seen as a matter for government rather than voluntary organisations.

In 1918, the state government opened four baby clinics in rented cottages in the Brisbane metropolitan area at Fortitude Valley, Woolloongabba, Spring Hill and West End. From 1920, the government took over the operations of the Golden Casket as a means of financing its operations after London investors imposed an economic blockade of the State's Labor Government, which threatened their interests. Profits from the Casket were diverted to a Maternal and Child Welfare Fund to finance the provision of health and hospital care as a universal right, regardless of income.

One way this was enacted was through the Maternity Act of 1922 that provided for the establishment of maternity wards and cottage hospitals throughout the state. In conjunction with this, baby clinics were to be built in the major provincial centres with smaller towns and settlements served by sub-clinics. The Public Works Department developed a standard building plan and construction began on the first clinics in 1923. A total of 23 baby clinics were built throughout Queensland with many of the early 'extra-metropolitan' clinics being identical. However, there were a number of departures from this standard plan. In Brisbane, the Fortitude Valley Clinic (1924) that was also the State's nurse training clinic, the Woolloongabba Clinic (1928) and the Herschell Street Clinic (1934) were all substantial two-storey brick buildings.

A baby clinic had operated in Herschell Street from 1925-26. It conformed to the directive from the Director of Infant Welfare, Alfred Jefferis Turner, that a clinic should be "centrally located, close to ...[transport] and the shopping centre, so that mothers may easily visit it during their weekly visits to the shops."¹ The Herschell Street clinic was just around the corner from the George Street retail precinct, then Brisbane's largest shopping precinct after Queen Street and Fortitude Valley. The clinic was close to the George Street tramline and Roma Street Railway Station. The clinic operated in a building on the west side of the street until 1928-29 when it was moved to a cottage on the east side.

In September 1928, the eight perches of the land on which this cottage stood was resumed by the government and permanently reserved for the Baby Clinic. The Public Works Department constructed the current building on this land in 1934. The new brick clinic was estimated to cost £3,473. The 1934 Public Works Department Annual Report described the building as being of:

*two storeys ...and of brick construction with a tiled roof. The ground floor was to contain an entrance porch, waiting room, doctors' room, special treatment rooms, test feed room, sink room and kitchen. On the first floor will be a solarium extending across the full width of the frontage with large windows on the front and on to the laneway at the side. The remainder of the floor will be occupied by the test feed room, special treatment room, sink room, kitchen and nurses' room, with necessary bath and lavatory accommodation.*²

In 1927, the Director of Infant Welfare reported increases in both the quantity and quality of the work of baby clinics, although increases in the numbers of new mothers visiting the clinics with their infants left the nurses with less time for visiting new mothers at home. In 1925-26 5,439 infants and children attended the original George [Herschel] Street clinic. Following the completion of the new building in 1934, 12,857 infants and children attended the clinic. Attendances increased to 13,457 by 1936 and a fire escape was added for the safety of mothers and children in 1940. It was the centre for numerous branch clinics starting with Indooroopilly in 1935-36 and then extending to encompass Chelmer, Corinda, Darra, Enoggera, Graceville, Inala, Inala Heights, Kenmore, Mitchelton, Oxley, St. Lucia, Toowong and Wacol by 1960. Although attendances at Herschell Street peaked at 17,854 in 1957-58, by 1969-70 attendances of infants and children at the Herschell Street Centre and its sub-Centres totalled 19,828.

A substantial interwar building, it was constructed in the middle of the Great Depression (1929-39) that was beginning to have serious effects in Queensland. The Herschell Street Clinic was the second of only two baby clinics built during the Depression. It was the last brick clinic built in Brisbane before World War Two (1939-45) caused a complete hiatus of clinic building. The war also caused major disruptions to the brick industry so that, even by 1950, the Works Department found it difficult to procure an adequate supply of face bricks.

Description

This two-storey face brick prismatic shape building with a tiled, hipped roof has strong elements of the Inter-War Georgian Revival style.

The Herschel Street facade is symmetrical with a central recessed entrance flanked by wide sash windows with sidelights. The corner piers of this facade extend through the roofline. A narrow, low-pitched, tiled awning, supported by ornate consoles, extends across the facade above the ground floor openings. The ground floor windows on the laneway side of the building are timber sash while all first floor windows are timber casements.

The building appears to be fairly intact with the only detected change to the exterior being the addition of vertical screening for the first floor windows on the Hershel Street elevation.

Although the building was renovated on a number of occasions, the original layout is intact, as is much of the original fabric.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as its construction reflects the changing attitudes of the Queensland Government towards the welfare of women and babies in the first half of the twentieth century.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as a substantially intact two-storey interwar baby clinic.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

for its contribution to the health and welfare of tens of thousands of women and children in Brisbane from the 1930s until at least the 1970s.

Supporting images



Brisbane City Council,
'Baby Clinic - Herschell Street - Brisbane', undated,
Brisbane Images Collection, Brisbane City Council
Library Services (BCC-B120-80975).

References

1. "Infant Welfare – Information contained in the first Annual Report for the Year 1926-27", *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, v.1, 1928, p. 1175
2. Annual Report of Department of Public Works, 1934, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, v.2, 1934, p.

3. Annual Reports Maternal and Infant Welfare, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1925 – 1975. [Periodic name changes – post c.1970 in Health & Medical Reports]
4. Annual Reports of the Department of Public Works, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1925 – 1975
5. Blake, T., Kennedy, M., Pullar, M., *Queensland Health Heritage Survey*, Vols. 1 & 2, October 1996
6. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
7. Brisbane City Council, Water Supply & Sewerage Detail Plan No.14, 5 Oct 1914
8. Department of Natural Resources. Queensland Certificates of Title
9. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
10. Mahlstedt & Son, City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 3, 1951.
11. Pearn, J. & Cobcroft M. (eds), *Fevers and Frontiers*, Brisbane, University of Queensland, 1990
12. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
13. Selby, W. *Motherhood in Labor's Queensland 1915-1957*, PhD thesis, Griffith University, 1992

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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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